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ABSTRACT

In 1982 an experimental program of weekly school observations was added to the required Education Psychology course for elementary education students in their junior year at Nazareth College of Rochester, New York. The program was extended to include secondary education students in 1985. Weekly reports from student observers became an important line of communication between the students and their instructors and the basic device for integrating theory and practice. Assignments typically involved reading a textbook chapter, observing working teachers for indications or examples of the theoretical material presented, and describing these observations. The major focus was upon examples of student motivation, reinforcement, retention, and transfer. This paper describes how the program worked, and ways in which it helped preservice students relate what they learned in their college course with actual practice in the classroom. Sample worksheets written by students are attached and their reactions to the field experience are summarized. (JD)

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INTEGRATING EARLY FIELD EXPERIENCE WITH EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING METHODOLOGY

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Practicality is important, but so is theory. Blending them together in teacher preparation is the crucial issue for today's teacher educators. Theory quickly becomes lifeless when divorced from practicality. Application, on its part, becomes sterile where it is torn from conceptual roots. Curriculum reform depends on both for vitality.

Ruth C. West
The Educational Forum
Summer 1986, p. 456

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INTEGRATING EARLY FIELD EXPERIENCE WITH EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING METHODOLOGY

Increased attention over the past several years to the quality of teacher education graduates and the collegiate programs in which they are prepared has caused teacher educators to examine all aspects of their program offerings including the field experiences they provide for their students. There is little consensus within the profession regarding the value of field experience. Although most teacher education programs still include some form of student teaching and early field experience, the function and purpose of such field placements has been challenged. Simply spending time in schools is no longer sufficient rationale for including field placements in teacher preparation programs.

Two criteria have emerged that help teacher educators assess the quality of field experiences. One criterion is that they should have clearly delineated purposes that serve the goals of the teacher education program as a whole. The second criterion is that the field experiences should be integrated with the entire curriculum in a meaningful way that enables students to draw relationships between their academic and professional course work and the practical world of the classroom. This concept of integration goes beyond the usual theory-practice debate. The assumption here is that the task of teacher education is to nourish the habits of mind that enable future teachers to draw upon all of their knowledge, creativity, and will in the journey toward becoming a teacher.

Faculty at Nazareth College of Rochester, New York have been working over a five-year period to effect a meaningful integration of professional courses and field experiences. Nazareth is a small, liberal arts college which maintains a strong commitment to the liberal arts and humanities as the proper foundation for a professional education. Accordingly, its teacher education programs are assigned a minimal number of courses and credits. Prior to 1982, there were no structured field experiences for teacher education students before the professional semester which included student teaching. The lack of school experiences in observation and participation was noted by cooperating teachers and by college supervisors working with the student teachers. In 1982 an experimental program of weekly school observations was added to the required Educational Psychology course for Elementary Education students in their junior year. The program was extended to include Secondary Education students in 1985.

The effect of school observations was sensed immediately in the Educational Psychology course. Textbook assignments were reformulated to become topics for observation. Weekly reports from observers became an important line of communication between student and instructor and the basic device for integrating theory and practice. Assignments typically involved reading a textbook chapter, observing for indications or examples of the theoretical material presented, and describing these observations. (See sample worksheets attached)

When M. Hunter's Effective Teaching model was initiated as a district-wide inservice effort in our cooperating school district, the "principles of learning" portions of the methodology were simply meshed with the textbook content and incorporated into the observation calendar of focus topics (Motivation, Reinforcement, Retention, Transfer).

Students were actively involved not only in reading but also in observing, discussing, and writing about actual classroom events, their relationship to theoretical principles, and the implications for good teaching practice. Instructor comments on the weekly reports served to personalize the assignment and to provoke further thought on the part of the writer. All of this activity was designed to structure the student's experience so that an integration of theory and practice might gradually take place in the student's mind.

We found that observation also served some of the developmental needs of students. It offered them a safe environment with opportunities to assess the demands of teaching without the formalized expectations for their performance that accompany student teaching. It also helped them assess their own potential and fitness for teaching as a career. Most importantly, observation tapped into the motivational life of the education students. Their interactions with children provided a motivational spark that brought their course work into focus and strengthened their personal commitment to teaching.

Indirectly the Education Department and the College have benefitted from the collaboration of district teachers and administrators with college faculty in shaping the observation program. In turn, district teachers have benefitted from assuming a broader role in teacher preparation. Their involvement with the students as juniors (prior to student teaching) helped them grasp the developmental aspects of a teacher education curriculum and ways in which field experiences can be designed to meet the needs of students at varying points in their preparation. Because many of the teachers were engaged in a serious study of teaching through their "Effective Teaching" inservice program, the stage was set for creating a preservice-inservice continuum linking teachers and teacher educators in a mutual search for excellence in teaching practice.

The process of developing an observation program for our students has not been trouble-free, and some problems remain unresolved. A major curriculum innovation affects the organization of the entire department and has implications college-wide. We found that the original design which worked well in the elementary schools was not suited for the secondary level, and major adjustments had to be made in the Secondary Program. Issues of faculty load and responsibility for the observations programs, school visits and monitoring of students' progress, compensation for teachers who accept observers — all present ongoing difficulties.

We accept the difficulties as an inevitable condition of major program change. We have seen the program evolve from a modest beginning to an established and highly regarded component of the curriculum. Most importantly, we have observed its effects on our students, and we are convinced that carefully structured observation experiences can contribute to their development as thoughtful, committed, new teachers.

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EDU 402 Educational Psychology for Secondary Teaching

Spring 1986
Dr. Patricia Pivnick
Phone: 586-2525 X578

OBSERVATION CALENDAR

Week	Dates	M	T	W	R	F	Focus topics
1	Feb.	3	4	5	6	7	Age-level Characteristics
2	Feb.	10	11	12	13	14	Motivation
	(Public school vacation week of Feb. 17-21)						
3	Feb.	24	25	26	27	28	Special Education
4	March	3	4	5	6	7	Reinforcement Theory
5	March	10	11	12	13	14	Discovery/Inquiry Learning
6	March	17	18	19	20	21	Evaluation
	(No observation week of March 24-28)						
	(Public school vacation and Nazareth vacation week of March 31-April 4)						
7	April	7	8	9	10	11	Classroom Management
8	April	14	15	16	17	18	Open Observation

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EXAMPLES OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY ASSIGNMENTS

FOCUS TOPIC FOR SCHOOL OBSERVATIONS

Motivation - Assignment 5

Read Chapter 11

1. Of the three views of motivation presented, which do you prefer and why?

2. Describe below one or more techniques your observation teacher uses to increase student motivation and comment on its effectiveness.

Information Processing - Assignment 6

Read Chapter 10

1. Using the text material (especially the sections called "Control Processes for the Sensory Register" and "Control Processes for Short and Long-Term Memory,") describe some techniques a teacher in your subject area might use to help students remember what she/he has taught them.

   You may also use examples from observation.

Special Education - Assignment 7

Read Chapter 11

1. Describe below some provision your school makes for exceptional students such as resource rooms, special classes, tutoring, mainstreaming. You may have to ask your teacher for this information.

2. Select two of the suggestions in Chapter 11 for working with exceptional students and discuss these in relation to teaching your subject.

Reinforcement - Assignment 8

Read Chapter 7

1. Based on the reading and your observations describe below some examples of the use of positive reinforcement in your classrooms. Give your opinion of their effectiveness.

(3)

Discovery (Cognitive Theories) - Assignment 9

Read Chapter 8, a very important chapter.

1. Describe below an example of a problem-solving or discovery activity you have observed in your school.

2. Describe a technique you have observed that is designed to promote transfer of learning.

Testing and Evaluation - Assignment 10

Chapters 4 and 12

1. Using the reading as background information, try to determine what forms of student evaluation are used in your school. If possible, look at the report card that is used. Also, if possible, talk with your teacher about the ways he/she records data on student progress, uses tests, and determines final marks.

Classroom Management - Assignment 12

Read Chapter 13

1. Choose one of the four characteristics of the well-managed classroom listed on page 610 and relate it to your observation classroom(s)

   (Brophy, 1979, Good, 1982)

   or

   Describe an incident you have observed that illustrates one of the influence techniques listed on pages 628-633.

NAME: _____ EDU 402

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Assignment 5 Due: Feb. 17 (M) 18 (T) MOTIVATION

Read Chapter 11.

1. Of the three views of motivation presented, which do you prefer and why?

2. Describe below one or more techniques your observation teacher uses to increase student motivation and comment on its effectiveness:

3. Other comments about observation:

NAME: Donna Marie Hilmer Subject: Secondary Math / EDU 402 (5)

Assignment 5 Due: Feb. 17 (M) (18) (T) MOTIVATION ✓ FEB 18 1986

Read Chapter 11.

1. Of the three views of motivation presented, which do you prefer and why?

I prefer the cognitive view, because it is more centered around the individuals way of seeing what is important (desired behavior), rather than the learner being the object. The motivation in this respect is intrinsic, where the student learns for the rewards. I suppose I see the behavioral view as the most because the student here is "shaped" into what the teacher wants, not motivated to be his own person. Students are taught to behave a certain way for a reward, and as Pavlov's dogs were. The desire of the student to reach a level of achievement comes from within, & the student strives for the answer to a difficult problem as the "reward" to the active. Since the student is motivated from within the learning, he is more likely to remember what was learned in the process, & hopefully, be able to generalize these techniques to solve other problems in the future. Well done!

2. Describe below one or more techniques your observation teacher uses to increase student motivation and comment on its effectiveness:

In my teacher's first class, it is evident that the attention span is very limited, so his method of motivation is to keep the lesson as short & variable as possible. So the students will feel they have learned something. Each student is given an equal opportunity to answer questions, showing there is no favoritism (which could very well turn students off & work against any attempts to motivate them). Another great technique he used was allowing the students to obtain answers on their own by what they already know through previous experiences. He'd get them to think back to an assignment they did - as far back as November - & then let them come up with the concept on their own. Many times they were very proud of themselves for having remembered the idea that far back, plus the fact that they were capable of doing the current assignment. It was the idea of personal satisfaction that he stressed, especially when he had them write answers to questions on the board. This motivated students to do their homework, so they could be called on, but more importantly to work out the hardest problems they could so "the smart ones" when no one else in the class was able to get the answer.

Very good analysis. Jere.

3. Other comments about observation:

It's really interesting going from one side of education to the next - from me as the student to them as the students. As you watch the homework being explained, you think "oh, that's obvious", but to them, this is a whole different ballgame. I always put myself in the position of the teacher, & think of how I would approach each concept to be taught. It's good to do this, to start thinking like the teacher.

12 Bracketed pages. Donna.

NAME Nancy Naugle Subject: Secondary English EDU 402 (6)

Assignment 5 Due: Feb. 17 (M) 18 (T) MOTIVATION FEB 18 1986

Read Chapter 11.

1. Of the three views of motivation presented, which do you prefer and why?

I prefer the Cognitive View of motivation because I believe it can be very effective in teaching English. I believe I can teach a student to write more clearly by creating in him a dissatisfaction, or disequilibrium, with his current writings. I believe I can teach literature by getting the student to ask "Why?" about a poem or a short story. I realize there are many drawbacks to the Cognitive approach, so I plan to use parts of all three views in my teaching. Yes. But, you have an excellent point here in favor of this approach.

2. Describe below one or more techniques your observation teacher uses to increase student motivation and comment on its effectiveness:

In Mrs. O'Connor's eighth grade English class last week, the students were completing their notecards and outlines, and were beginning the rough draft of a research paper which is due the week they return from February break. Mrs. O'Connor spent most of the class time going from desk to desk checking on the progress of each student. She always said something positive about the student's work and encouraged the student to "keep up the good work" (Behavioral View of Motivation). Yes.

I also noticed the Humanistic View of Motivation being practiced when I observed. When I arrived, Mrs. O'Connor told me that one of her student's fathers had suddenly become critically ill and that he needed special attention. Later, I saw a note which had come from the office. The note read: "K's father is critically ill. Mom sent him to school. He'll need TLC today." This incident is a good example of teachers and the administration of a school realizing that a student's "deficiency needs" are important and must be met in order for that student to function properly. Excellent example. This says a lot about the school.

3. Other comments about observation:

I had the opportunity to help a student on an individual basis during one of the class periods. The student wasn't quite sure how to set up an outline of his research paper. Mrs. O'Connor asked me to spend a few minutes with him because she had not finished checking the progress of the entire class. I worked with him about ten minutes. When the bell rang, he had two good ideas for a proper outline. I felt like I had been helpful. What a great feeling! Right.

You sound like a teacher, Nancy. LB.

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R U 3/21/86 Subject: Secondary Biology

Response to comments on discovery and problem-solving in Mr. Glass

Mr. does a terrific job in calling the students to think more deeply, make connections and notice similarities and differences. There are certainly elements of discovery and problem solving in this, and your point is well taken that with his experience and expertise, much of this is done almost automatically. However, I feel that in science classes like biology, a more formalized and systematic approach to discovery and problem-solving is necessary in order to familiarize the students with the "process" of science. This seems to take a back seat to learning the course content that is necessary for success in the Regents Exam. Perhaps I am more sensitive to this than many teachers because of my involvement in doing scientific research for many years. I feel strongly about the importance of spending more time involving students in the scientific process with its emphasis on hypothesis formation, discovery, problem-solving and asking the right questions. My research paper explores this area.

I found this response heart warming. Your position is in the best pedagogical tradition of Bruner, i.e. that students should learn the unique processes of each discipline so that they can learn to think like a

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scientist, an artist or historian. Herein lies not only the power of the methodology but also the passion of the discipline.

Thanks for taking your time & help me with this!

(9)

STUDENT REACTION TO STRUCTURED OBSERVATION

At the end of the first semester of observation (Spring 1982), the students were asked to complete a Reactionnaire on the classroom observation experience. The following are excerpts from their responses:

I think it is very important for prospective teachers to spend time in a school as we did. It's so different from what college courses are preparing us for. We got the best of both worlds--a college course to help prepare us and a taste of what the school classroom is like.

It's hard for us to believe at times that a child has a hard time with conservation, etc. You have to see it for yourself, and that's what we were allowed to do. Great experience!

Class discussions based on observations were always interesting. It was also helpful in hearing how others would handle different situations.

The observing was the most important part of the course. I learned the most by being exposed to a classroom and seeing how a teacher actually applies different methods to teaching. Getting different ideas from the teacher and seeing the way the children interact was very important in understanding the course content.

I loved my classroom assignment. The teacher I was with always included me in any activity and took the time to explain her policies on various things such as classroom management and her approach to teaching.

I saw what is important in the children's lives.

This was an excellent experience in preparing for student teaching.

Even if my student teaching is only half as enjoyable and valuable as this spring's placement it will be totally worth the experience. I learned a great deal watching my teacher, but above all else I got hope that I can really accomplish something through teaching. As one listens to all the critics tear the system apart one begins to wonder if it's even worth trying. However, Mrs. K. has shown me that with skill, time, knowledge and a little caring, teaching can be very worthwhile and rewarding.

I can't imagine not having a chance to be in the schools before student teaching.

The observations showed me everything in live action. Sometimes it helped to put the pieces together that weren't fitting right in class.

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By the end of our observations, I felt quite comfortable with the classroom atmosphere.

I think the observation is vital. It involves the students actively in being responsible for the course material. It helps us to integrate the material with the everyday usage of the material which can be of use to us later on in our careers.

When I first started observing the class appeared haphazard and confusing, but I later realized that the children learned a great deal with the freedom they had.

It was useful but there didn't seem to be enough time to get it all in.

Fantastic! What a learning experience, and so much fun. Whatever you do, be sure this stays as part of the program.

A perfect approach to student teaching.

Many of the theories presented in the text appear abstract, shallow, and static. Yet, when actually seeing these theories operate in the classroom, the book and the theories jump into life. For example, Bloom's taxonomy is definitely alive and blooming at Park Road School! Mrs. Fitch works from the base level of knowledge by providing facts and terms. She gradually moves the students to the next level of comprehension by bringing the facts together, and so on. By careful observation, I could see the kids moving from stage to stage each time I observed.